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Juche

Juche (English: /ˈdʒuːtʃeɪ/ , *JOO-chay*; Korean: [tɕutɕʰe]), officially the ***Juche* idea**, is the state ideology of North Korea and the official ideology of the Workers' Party of Korea. North Korean sources attribute its conceptualization to Kim Il Sung, the country's founder and first leader. *Juche* was originally regarded as a variant of Marxism–Leninism until Kim Jong Il, Kim Il Sung's son and successor, declared it a distinct ideology in the 1970s. Kim Jong Il further developed *Juche* in the 1980s and 1990s by making ideological breaks from Marxism–Leninism and increasing the importance of his father's ideas.

Juche incorporates the historical materialist ideas of Marxism–Leninism but also strongly emphasizes the individual, the nation state, and national sovereignty. *Juche* posits that a country will prosper once it has become self-reliant by achieving political, economic, and military independence. As Kim Jong Il emerged as Kim Il Sung's likely successor in the 1970s, loyalty to the leader was increasingly emphasized as an essential part of *Juche*, as expressed in the Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System.

Juche has been variously described by critics as a quasi-religion, a nationalist or fascistic ideology, and a deviation from Marxism–Leninism.[1][2][3][4]

Juche

Torch symbolizing *Juche* at the top of the *Juche* Tower in Pyongyang

Korean name	
Chosŏn'gŭl	주체사상
Hancha	主體思想
Revised Romanization	*Juche sasang*
McCune–Reischauer	*Chuch'e sasang*

Literally "subject idea"

Etymology

Juche comes from the Sino-Japanese word 主體 (modern spelling: 主体), whose Japanese reading is *shutai*. The word was coined in 1887 to translate the concept of *Subjekt* in German philosophy (subject, meaning "the entity perceiving or acting upon an object or environment") into Japanese. The word migrated to the Korean language at around the turn of the century and retained this meaning.[5] *Shutai* went on to appear in Japanese translations of Karl Marx's writings.[6] North Korean editions of Marx used the word *Juche* even before the word was attributed to Kim Il Sung in its supposedly novel meaning in 1955.[7]

In contemporary political discourse on North Korea, *Juche* has a connotation of "self-reliance", "autonomy", and "independence".[8][9][10] It is often defined in opposition to the Korean concept of *Sadae*, or reliance on the great powers.[11] South Koreans use the word without reference to the North Korean ideology.[12]

The ideology is officially known as *Juche sasang* (주체사상) in Korean and the *Juche* idea in English. *Juche sasang* literally means "subject idea"[13] and has also been translated as *Juche* thought[14] or Jucheism.[15] Adherents of *Juche* are sometimes referred to as "Jucheists".[16]

Development

Official statements by the North Korean government attribute the origin of *Juche* to Kim Il Sung's experiences in the Down-with-Imperialism Union during Korea's liberation struggle against Japan.[17][18] However, the first documented reference to *Juche* as an ideology did not appear until 1955, when Kim Il Sung delivered a speech entitled "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* in Ideological Work". The speech had been delivered to promote a political purge similar to the earlier Yan'an Rectification Movement in China.[19] It later became known as the "*Juche* speech"[20] and is considered one of Kim Il Sung's most important works.[21]

Western scholars generally agree that Hwang Jang-yop, Kim Il Sung's top adviser on philosophy, was the actual person responsible for the conceptualization and early development of *Juche*.[22] Hwang rediscovered the *Juche* speech sometime in the late 1950s, when Kim Il Sung, having established a cult of personality,[23] sought to develop his own version of Marxism–Leninism and solidify his position within the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK).[24][25] Hwang subsequently expanded upon the meaning of *Juche* and rewrote Korean communist history to make it appear as though Kim Il Sung had been the WPK's leader since its inception.[24] Andrei Lankov, a Russian scholar of Korean studies, argues that the first reference to *Juche* as an ideology did not come until 14 April 1965, when Kim Il Sung gave a speech in Indonesia entitled "On Socialist Construction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the South Korean Revolution" (조선민주주의인민공화국에서의사회주의건설과남조선혁명에대하여). Lankov posits that the 1955 speech "used the word in a different meaning" and that *Juche* was not adopted as the "basic ideological principle of North Korean politics" until after the 1965 speech.[26]

On the Juche Idea, the principal work on *Juche*, was published under Kim Jong Il's name in 1982.[27] In North Korea it serves as "the authoritative and comprehensive explanation of *Juche*".[27] According to the treatise, the WPK is responsible for educating the masses in the ways of *Juche* thinking.[27] *Juche* is inexorably linked with Kim Il Sung and "represents the guiding idea of the Korean revolution".[27] Although *Juche* has its roots in Marxism–Leninism, it is not merely a creative application of the ideas of Marx and Lenin to Korean conditions.[28] Rather, it is a "new phase of revolutionary theory"[28] and represents "a new era in the development of human history".[27] Kim Jong Il also criticized the Korean communists and nationalists of the 1920s for their "elitist posture", claiming that they were "divorced from the masses".[29]

The North Korean government issued a decree on 8 July 1997, the third anniversary of the death of Kim Il Sung, declaring the adoption of the *Juche* calendar.[30] The Central People's Committee subsequently promulgated regulations regarding its use in August 1997,[31] and the calendar entered public usage on 9 September 1997, the Day of the Foundation of the Republic.[30] Gregorian calendar dates are used for years before 1912 while years from 1912 (the year of Kim Il Sung's birth) onwards are described as "*Juche*

years". The Gregorian year 2024, for example, is "*Juche* 113" as 2024 − 1911 = 113. When used, "*Juche* years" are often accompanied by the Gregorian equivalent, i.e. "*Juche* 113, 2024" or "*Juche* 113 (2024)".[31]

Core principles

The goal of *Juche* is to establish a self-reliant state which independently determines its political, economic, and military affairs. Kim Il Sung summarized the application of this objective to North Korea in a 1967 speech to the Supreme People's Assembly entitled "Let Us Embody the Revolutionary Spirit of Independence, Self-sustenance and Self-defence More Thoroughly in All Fields of State Activity":[32]

> First, the government of the republic will implement with all consistency the line of independence, self-sufficiency, and self-defence to consolidate the political independence of the country, build up more solidly the foundations of an independent national economy capable of insuring the complete unification, independence, and prosperity of our nation and increasing the country's defence capabilities, so as to safeguard the security of the fatherland reliably by our own force, by splendidly embodying our party's idea of *Juche* in all fields.[33]

Political independence (자주; *jaju*) is a core principle of *Juche*. *Juche* stresses equality and mutual respect among nations, asserting that every state has the right to self-determination.[34] Yielding to foreign pressure or intervention would violate the principle of political independence and threaten a country's ability to defend its sovereignty.[34] This is in contrast to *sadaejuui* (사대주의), which advocates reliance on a great power.[35] *Juche*, however, does not advocate total isolation and encourages cooperation between socialist states.[34] As Kim Jong Il summarizes in his work *On the Juche Idea*: "Independence is not in conflict with internationalism but is the basis of its strengthening".[36] Kim Il Sung acknowledged that it was important for North Korea to learn from other socialist states, in particular the Soviet Union and China, but he did not want to follow their examples dogmatically.[34] In this regard, Kim Il Sung said that the WPK needed to "resolutely repudiate the tendency to swallow things of others undigested or imitate them mechanically", attributing the early success of North Korea to the WPK's independence in policymaking.[34]

Economic self-sufficiency (자립; *jarip*) is required to achieve political independence, according to adherents of *Juche*.[34] Kim Il Sung believed that excessive foreign aid threatened a country's ability to develop socialism, which only a state with a strong, independent economy could build.[34] In his work *On the Juche Idea*, Kim Jong Il argued that a state can only achieve economic self-sufficiency once it has created an "independent national economy" based on heavy industry,[37] as this sector would theoretically drive the rest of the economy. Kim Jong Il also emphasized the importance of technological independence[38] and self-sufficiency in resources.[39] However, he stated that this did not rule out "economic cooperation" between socialist states.[39]

Military self-reliance (자위; *jawi*) is also crucial for a state to maintain its political independence.[40] To accomplish military self-reliance, states must develop a domestic defence industry to avoid dependence on foreign arms suppliers.[41] Kim Jong Il argued that it was acceptable for socialist states to receive military aid from their allies, but such aid would only be effective if the state is militarily strong in its own right.[42]

Juche in practice

Diplomacy

North Korea maintained close relations with the Soviet Union and China during the Cold War, having emerged from Soviet occupation and a war which it fought alongside Chinese communists. However, North Korea also opposed what it viewed as Soviet and Chinese attempts to interfere in its post-war affairs.[43] For example, a failed challenge against Kim Il Sung's leadership in 1956 led to the purge of both pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese elements from the WPK.[44] Although North Korea rejected the de-Stalinization efforts of Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, it avoided taking sides during the Sino-Soviet split.[45]

North Korea was admitted to the Non-Aligned Movement in 1975 and has since presented itself as a leader of the Third World, promoting *Juche* as a model for developing countries to follow.[46][47]

National survival has been seen as a guiding principle of North Korea's diplomatic strategy.[48] As countries in the Eastern Bloc collapsed and introduced market reforms, North Korea increasingly emphasized *Juche* in both theory and practice.[49][50][51] Even in the midst of economic and political crises, North Korea continues to emphasize its independence on the world stage.[52]

Economics

After the devastation of the Korean War, North Korea began to rebuild its economy with a base in heavy industry, with the aim of becoming as self-sufficient as possible.[53] As a result, North Korea developed what has been called the "most autarkic industrial economy in the world".[54][55] While North Korea received economic aid and technical assistance from the Soviet Union and China, it did not join Comecon, the communist common market.[56][57] In the 1990s, it had one of the world's lowest rates for dependence on petroleum, using hydroelectric power and coal instead of imported oil.[58] Its textile industry uses vinylon, known as the "*Juche* fiber", which was invented by a Korean and which is made from locally available coal and limestone.[59][60] The history of the development of vinylon often featured in propaganda that preached the virtues of technological self-reliance.[55] North Korea had 10,000 CNC machines in 2010.[61] The first domestic homemade CNC machine was introduced in 1995 and in 2017 it had around 15,000 machines.[62]

Commentators have often pointed out the discrepancy between the principle of self-sufficiency and North Korea's dependence on foreign aid, especially during its economic crisis in the 1990s.[63] The pursuit of economic autarky has been blamed for contributing to the crisis.[64] On this view, attempts at self-sufficiency led to inefficiency and to the neglect of export opportunities in industries where there was a comparative advantage.[65]

Defence

The Korean People's Army is one of the largest on earth and has developed its own nuclear missiles.[66][67] It produces UDMH fuel for liquid fuelled missiles[68] and Tumansky RD-9 Turbojet engines, which power the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-19 and Shenyang J-6.[69] CNC machines are used for production of missiles and centrifuges.[62] North Korea's propaganda since the Korean War has contrasted its military autonomy with the presence of U.S. forces in the South.[55]

International outreach

Tribute plaques to *Juche* from foreign delegates, contained in the interior entrance of the *Juche* Tower

Kim Il Sung believed that *Juche*'s principles could be applied around the world, not just in Korea.[70] North Korea has organized international seminars on *Juche* since 1976. The International Scientific Seminar on the *Juche* Idea took place in Antananarivo, Madagascar, from 28 to 30 September 1976 under the sponsorship of the Democratic Republic of Madagascar. Many prominent party and government officials, public figures, representatives of revolutionary and progressive organizations, scientists and journalists from more than fifty countries attended. Malagasy President Didier Ratsiraka expressed strong sympathies and support for North Korea. An excerpt from the opening speech says:

> Regardless of the opposition forces, the determination of the people and their strength and conviction are not measured by territorial dimensions, possession of advanced technology, still less, opulence or riches. For those who wish to forget the lesson of history so easily and so quickly, Algeria, Vietnam, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola – and closer to us – Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Azania are excellent examples which make them deeply reflect on. What we want is not the perfection of political independence alone. The evil forces craftily manipulate the economic levers in order to perpetuate their supremacy and reduce us to vassals and eternal mendicants.[71]

The North Korean government established the International Institute of the *Juche* Idea (initially the International *Juche* Research Centre) in Tokyo in 1978 in order to supervise the activities of international *Juche* study groups.[72] Tribute plaques from these groups are contained in the *Juche* Tower in Pyongyang.[9] In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Black Panther Party of the United States studied *Juche*.[73] In 2016, the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party declared *Juche* its guiding idea.[74]

A number of far-right groups have also adopted *Juche*. The Order of Nine Angles-affiliated Rural People's Party adheres to *Juche* and reportedly has connections with North Korean officials.[75] The Atomwaffen Division also promotes *Juche*.[76]

Related concepts

Songun

Songun (선군정치; *Sŏn'gun chŏngch'i*; lit. military-first politics) was first mentioned on 7 April 1997 in *Rodong Sinmun* under the headline "There Is a Victory for Socialism in the Guns and Bombs of the People's Army" (인민군대의 총창우에 사회주의의 승리가 있다). Its description in the article echoed the

military-centered thinking of the time: "[*Songun* is] the revolutionary philosophy to safeguard our own style of socialism under any circumstances". The concept was credited to Kim Jong Il,[77] who posited that *Songun* was the next stage of development of *Juche*.[78]

Propaganda art promoting *Songun*. The Korean text reads, "Long live the great victory of military-first (*Songun*) politics!"

A joint editorial entitled "Our Party's Military-First Politics Will Inevitably Achieve Victory and Will Never Be Defeated" (우리 당의 선군정치는 필승불패이다) was published by *Kulloja* and *Rodong Sinmun* (the WPK's theoretical magazine and newspaper, respectively) on 16 June 1999.[79] In it, it was stated that *Songun* meant "the leadership method under the principle of giving priority to the military and resolving the problems that may occur in the course of revolution and construction as well as establishing the military as the main body of the revolution in the course of achieving the total tasks of socialism". While the article often referred to "our Party", this was not a reference to the WPK but rather to the personal leadership of Kim Jong Il.[80]

The National Defence Commission, the highest military body, was designated the supreme body of the state by a 1998 revision of the North Korean Constitution. The *Songun* era is considered to have begun with this revision.[80]

In late 2021, Kim Jong Un declared that the "military-first" politics of *Songun* would be replaced by "people-first politics" (인민대중제일주의) guided by himself.[81]

Suryong

Suryong (수령형상창조; *Suryŏng hyŏngsang ch'angjo*; lit. creation of the lead figure) is a revolutionary theory concerning the relationship between leadership and society.[82] Unlike Marxism–Leninism, which considers developments in the material conditions of production and exchange as the driving force of historical progress (known as historical materialism), *Juche* considers human beings in general the driving force in history.[82] It is summarized as "the popular masses are placed in the center of everything, and the leader is the center of the masses".[82] *Juche*, North Korea maintains, is a "man-centered ideology" in which "man is the master of everything and decides everything".[82] In contrast to Marxism–Leninism, in which a people's decisions are conditioned by their relations to the means of production, *Juche* argues that people's decisions take consideration of, but are independent from, external factors.[82] Just like Marxism–Leninism, *Juche* believes history is law-governed, but that it is only man who drives progress, stating that "the popular masses are the drivers of history".[83] The process for the masses to reach consciousness, independence, and creativity requires the "leadership of a great leader".[83] Marxism–Leninism argues that the popular masses will lead (on the basis of their relation to production), but in North Korea the role of a correct leadership is required to organize a unified and effective group.[84] South Korean political scientist Lee Kyo-duk argues that *Suryong* helped Kim Il Sung establish a unitary system over North Korea.[84]

Visitors of the Mansu Hill Grand Monument in Pyongyang bow to massive bronze statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.

The theory says the leader has a decisive role as an absolute supreme leader.[85] The leader is like the brain of the working class, who is the driving force of revolution.[85] The leader is also a flawless human being who never commits mistakes, who guides the masses.[86] The popular masses are the driving force of history, but they require the guidance of the party leadership.[87]

Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism

At its fourth party conference in April 2012, the Workers' Party of Korea declared itself "the party of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il" and Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism as "the only guiding idea of the party".

Kimilsungism (김일성주의) and the Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System were formally introduced by Kim Jong Il in 1974.[88] Kim Jong Il reportedly did so to strengthen his position within the WPK, taking advantage of his father's political supremacy.[88] Kimilsungism refers to the ideas of Kim Il Sung, while the Ten Principles serve as a guide for North Korean political and social life.[88] Kim Jong Il argued that his father's ideas had evolved and they therefore deserved their own distinct name.[89] North Korean state media had previously described Kim Il Sung's ideas as "contemporary Marxism–Leninism"; by calling them "Kimilsungism", Kim Jong Il sought to elevate the ideas of his father to the same level of prestige as Stalinism and Maoism.[89] Not long after the introduction of "Kimilsungism" into the North Korean lexicon, Kim Jong Il began calling for a "Kimilsungist transformation" of North Korean society.[88]

Political analyst Lim Jae-cheon argues that there is no discernible difference between Kimilsungism and *Juche*, and that the two terms are interchangeable.[88] However, in his 1976 speech "On Correctly Understanding the Originality of Kimilsungism", Kim Jong Il said that Kimilsungism comprises the "*Juche* idea and a far-reaching revolutionary theory and leadership method evolved from this idea".[90] He further added that "Kimilsungism is an original idea that cannot be explained within the frameworks of Marxism–Leninism. The *Juche* idea, which constitutes the quintessence of Kimilsungism, is an idea newly discovered in the history of mankind".[89] Kim Jong Il went further, stating that Marxism–Leninism had become obsolete and must be replaced by Kimilsungism:[91]

> The revolutionary theory of Kimilsungism is a revolutionary theory which has provided solutions to problems arising in the revolutionary practice in a new age different from the era that gave rise to Marxism–Leninism. On the basis of *Juche* idea, the leader gave a profound explanation of the theories, strategies and tactics of national liberation, class emancipation and human liberations in our era. Thus, it can be said that the revolutionary theory of Kimilsungism is a perfect revolutionary theory of Communism in the era of *Juche*.[91]

According to analyst Shin Gi-wook, the ideas of *Juche* and Kimilsungism are in essence the "expressions of North Korean particularism over supposedly more universalistic Marxism–Leninism".[91] The new terminology signalled a move from socialism to nationalism.[91] This was evident in a speech presented by Kim Jong Il in 1982, during celebrations of his father's 70th birthday, in which he stated that love for the nation came before love for socialism.[92] This particularism gave birth to such concepts as "A Theory of the Korean Nation as Number One" (조선민족제일주의) and "Socialism of Our Style" (우리식사회주의).[93]

Following the death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011, Kimilsungism became **Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism** (김일성-김정일주의) at the 4th Conference of the Workers' Party of Korea in April 2012.[94] Party members at the conference also stated that the WPK was "the party of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il" and declared Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism "the only guiding idea of the party".[94] Afterwards, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) stated that "the Korean people have long called the revolutionary policies ideas of the President [Kim Il Sung] and Kim Jong Il as Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism and recognized it as the guiding of the nation".[95] Kim Jong Un, the son of Kim Jong Il who succeeded him as leader of the WPK, said:

> Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism is an integral system of the idea, theory and method of *Juche* and a great revolutionary ideology representative of the *Juche* era. Guided by Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism, we should conduct Party building and Party activities, so as to sustain the revolutionary character of our Party and advance the revolution and construction in line with the ideas and intentions of the President [Kim Il Sung] and the General [Kim Jong Il].[96]

Socialism of Our Style

"Socialism of Our Style" (우리식사회주의), also referred to as "Korean-style socialism" and "our-style socialism" within North Korea, is an ideological concept Kim Jong Il introduced on 27 December 1990 in the speech "Socialism of Our Country is a Socialism of Our Style as Embodied by the *Juche* Idea" (우리 나라 사회주의는 주체 사상을 구현한 우리식 사회주의이다).[93] Speaking after the Revolutions of 1989 that brought down the Eastern Bloc countries, Kim Jong Il explicitly stated that North Korea needed – and survived because of – Socialism of Our Style.[93] He argued that socialism in Eastern Europe failed because they "imitated the Soviet experience in a mechanical manner".[93] According to Kim, they failed to understand that the Soviet experience was based on specific historical and social circumstances and could not be used by other countries aside from the Soviet Union itself.[93] He added that "if experience is considered absolute and accepted dogmatically it is impossible to build Socialism properly, as the times change and the specific situation of each country is different from another".[93] Kim Jong Il went on to criticize "dogmatic application" of Marxism–Leninism, stating:[97]

> Marxism–Leninism presented a series of opinions on building of Socialism and Communism, but it confined itself to presupposition and hypothesis owing to the limitations of the conditions of their ages and practical experiences ... But many countries applied the principles of Marxist–Leninist materialistic conception of history dogmatically, failing to advance revolution continually after the establishment of the socialist system.[97]

North Korea would not encounter such difficulties because of the conceiving of *Juche*.[98] In his words, North Korea was "a backward, colonial semifeudal society" when the communists took over, but since the North Korean communists did not accept Marxism, which was based on European experiences with capitalism, or Leninism, which was based on Russia's experience, they conceived of *Juche*.[98] He believed that the situation in North Korea was more complex because of the American presence in nearby South Korea.[98] Thanks to Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il argued, the revolution had "put forward original lines and policies suited to our people's aspirations and the specific situation of our country".[98] "The *Juche* idea is a revolutionary theory which occupies the highest stage of development of the revolutionary ideology of the working class", Kim Jong Il said, further stating that the originality and superiority of the *Juche* idea defined and strengthened Korean socialism.[98] He then conceded by stating that Socialism of Our Style was "a man-centered Socialism", explicitly making a break with basic Marxist–Leninist thought, which argues that material forces are the driving force of historical progress, not people.[98] Socialism of Our Style was presented as an organic sociopolitical theory, using the language of Marxism–Leninism, saying:[99]

> The political and ideological might of the motive force of revolution is nothing but the power of single-hearted unity between the leader, the Party, and the masses. In our socialist society, the leader, the Party, and the masses throw in their lot with one another, forming a single socio-political organism. The consolidation of blood relations between the leader, the Party and the masses is guaranteed by the single ideology and united leadership.[99]

Analysis

Criticisms

Juche has been described by critics as a nationalist ideology and a departure from Marxist–Leninist principles.[100] American Koreanist Brian Reynolds Myers goes further and argue that *Juche* has more in common with Japanese fascism and ultranationalism than Marxism–Leninism.[2][3] Korean political scientist Suh Dae-sook argues that Kim Il Sung failed to explain the difference between socialist patriotism, which Kim Il Sung stated that he supported, and nationalism, which Kim Il Sung stated that he opposed. Suh also criticized Kim Il Sung's initial conceptualization of *Juche*, saying that he had failed to explain how Marxism–Leninism had been applied to Korean conditions.[4] American historian Derek R. Ford, by contrast, emphasizes the continuity between Marxism–Leninism and *Juche*,[101] and credits *Juche* as the unique guiding principle which allowed North Korea to survive the collapse of the Eastern Bloc.[102]

American historian Charles K. Armstrong argues that North Korea may appear "Stalinist in form" but is "nationalist in content".[103] Shin Gi-wook similarly argues that "there is no trace of Marxism–Leninism or the Stalinist notion of nationhood" in North Korea, and its government instead stresses the importance of the Korean people's blood, soul, and national traits, echoing earlier Korean nationalists such as Sin Chaeho, Yi Kwangsu and Choe Namson.[104] Shin believes that the key difference between Marxism–Leninism and *Juche* is that the latter places the primacy of ideology over materialism; the vocabulary of family lineage and nationalism is retained and given primacy over class struggle, while social distinction and hierarchy are supported instead of a classless society and egalitarianism.[103]

A few critics have dismissed the notion that *Juche* is an ideology altogether. Myers argues that *Juche* cannot be described as a true political ideology because it does not have an underlying belief system,[105] while Alzo David-West describes it as "meaningless on logical and naturalistic grounds".[106] American political

analyst Robert E. Kelly argues that *Juche* exists solely to protect the Kim family's monopoly over political power in North Korea.[107] However, Myers dismisses the idea that *Juche* is North Korea's leading ideology, regarding its public exaltation as being designed to deceive foreigners. He argues that it exists to be praised and not actually read.[108] Based on his own experiences living in North Korea, Swiss businessman Felix Abt describes Myers' arguments as "shaky" and "questionable". Having seen the extent to which North Korean university students actually believe in *Juche*, Abt says it is "rather absurd" to describe the ideology as "window-dressing" for foreigners.[109] American historian Bruce Cumings and Professor of International Relations Christoph Bluth similarly argue that *Juche* is not mere rhetoric, but rather an ideal of self-reliance that North Korea has attempted to put into practice.[54][57]

Comparisons to other ideologies

Juche has been compared to Ba'athism, an Arab nationalist ideology which advocates the establishment of a unified Arab state based on socialism and national self-reliance.[110] South Korean political commentator Park Sang-seek argues that Syrian Ba'athism in particular has rhetorical similarities to *Juche*, but the latter has a stronger ideological basis.[111]

Comparisons to religion

A number of scholars have compared facets of *Juche* to those of pre-existing religions in Korea. Jung Tae-il argues that certain elements of Christianity, Cheondoism, and Confucianism were appropriated by and incorporated into *Juche*.[112] Korean cultural anthropologists Byung Ho Chung and Heonik Kwon liken the commemorations of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il to Confucian ancestor worship.[112] Ju Jun-hui similarly contends that Korean shamanism also influenced the development of *Juche*, comparing the ecstatic state experienced in a shamanic ritual (*gut*) to the enthusiasm and fervor displayed by North Koreans for their supreme leader.[112] Armstrong accordingly describes *Juche* as a quasi-religion.[1]

Presence of a sacred leader

The ideology teaches that the role of a Great Leader is essential for the popular masses to succeed in their revolutionary movement because without leadership they are unable to survive.[113] This is the foundation of the personality cult directed at Kim Il Sung. The personality cult explains how the *Juche* ideology has been able to endure until today, even during the North Korean government's undeniable dependence on foreign assistance during its famine in the 1990s.[114] The concept of a "sacred leader" in *Juche* as well as the cult around the Kim family has been compared to the State Shinto ideology of Imperial Japan in which the Emperor was seen as a divine being.[115]

Through the fundamental belief in the essential role of the Great Leader, the former North Korean leader Kim Il Sung has become the "supreme deity for the people" and the *Juche* doctrine is reinforced in North Korea's constitution as the country's guiding principle.[116] The parallel relationship structure between Kim Il Sung and his people to religious founders or leaders and their followers has led many scholars to consider *Juche* a religious movement as much as a political ideology.[112] However, those familiar with cults would again posit that *Juche* bypasses the tenets of religion completely and instead meets the criteria of a totalitarian cult.[117]

Juche's emphasis on the political and sacred role of the leader and the ensuing worshipping by the popular masses has been critiqued by various Western Marxist intellectuals.[113] They argue that the North Korean working class or the proletariat has been stripped of their honour and therefore call the cult of personality non-Marxist and non-democratic.[118]

Rituals

The religious behaviour of *Juche* can also be seen in the perspectives of the North Korean people through refugee interviews from former participants in North Korea's ritual occasions. One pertinent example is the Arirang Festival, which is a gymnastics and artistic festival held in the Rungrado May Day Stadium in Pyongyang. All components of the festival, from the selection of performers, mobilization of resources, recruitment of the audience and publicity for the show have been compared to facets of a national religious event.[119]

The Arirang Festival has been described to demonstrate the power of the North Korean government to arrange a form of religious gathering. It has done so by "appropriating a mass of bodies for calisthenic and performative arts representing the leader as the father and his faithful followers".[120] The festival's effectiveness in transforming its participants into loyal disciples of *Juche* seems to originate from the collectivist principle of "one for all and all for one" and the ensuing emotional bond and loyalty to the leader.[120] According to the accounts of refugees who have been recruited to mass gymnastics, the collectivist principle has been nurtured through physical punishment such as beatings and more importantly the organization of recruits into small units, whose performances were held accountable by larger units.[121] The festival's ritual components of collectivism serve to reinforce a "certain structure of sociality and affect", establishing Kim Il Sung as the "father" in both the body and psyche of the performers.[120]

Familism

American historian Charles K. Armstrong argues that familism has transformed itself into a kind of political religion in the form of *Juche*. With the emergence of *Juche* as North Korea's guiding political principle since the 1960s, the familial relationship within the micro-family unit has been translated into a national, macro-unit with Kim Il Sung representing the father figure and the North Korean people representing his children. *Juche* is thus based on the language of family relationships with its East Asian or neo-Confucian "resonances of filial piety and maternal love".[122]

Armstrong also notes that North Korea has actually transferred the "filial piety of nationalism in the family of the leader himself" by positioning Kim Il Sung as the universal patriarch.[123] He argues that while the official pursuit of the *Juche* ideology in the 1960s signalled North Korea's desire to separate from the "fraternity of international socialism", the ideology also replaced Stalin as the father figure with Kim Il Sung.[124] In effect, North Korea's familial nationalism has supplanted the "rather abstract, class-oriented language of socialism with a more easily understandable and identifiable language of familial connections, love and obligations".[125]

After attaining significant positions in the WPK and military in the early 1980s, Kim Jong Il transformed the personality cult surrounding Kim Il Sung into a family cult and became the heir apparent.[126] Armstrong calls this a "family romance", which is a term Freud had used to describe "the neurotic replacement of a

child's real parents with fantasy substitutes".[127] Kim Il Sung's consecration as the "Great Father" has been strengthened by the development of the North Korean family romance with the language, symbols, and rituals associated with familism.[112]

See also

- Ilminism, political ideology of South Korea's first president, Syngman Rhee
- *Juche* faction, a political faction within South Korea's student movements
- Kim Il Sung bibliography
- Kim Jong Il bibliography
- Kim Jong Un bibliography
- National communism
- Revisionism (Marxism)

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2. Kelly 2015: "Brian Myers has led this school, which argues that North Korea is a misunderstood racist state based on Japanese and German fascist forms from the early twentieth century. It rallies its citizens through aggressive race-based nationalism (the defence of *minjok*), defends the racial 'cleanliness' of Korea in a big intrusive world, insists that ethnic Koreans of other nationalities are still Koreans, and routinely uses racist language in its diplomacy. On top of this, it is one of the most highly militarised states in the world. Racism plus hypermilitarism looks a lot more like fascism than communism."
3. Fisher 2016: "[The Soviets] had a problem: There wasn't really a leftist intelligentsia or officialdom to draw upon. So the Soviets ended up recycling in many of the Koreans who'd been a part of the Japanese fascist project in Korea. ... 'Almost all intellectuals who moved to Pyongyang after liberation had collaborated with the Japanese so some degree,' the historian B.R. Myers writes in his book *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters*."
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